

The Millennials' Quarter Life Crisis

A Generation at a Revolutionary Crossroads

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About the Author

TaraElla is a writer and musician, and a part of the millennial generation (also called Generation Y). In recent years she has been seeing the quarter life crisis happen to too many young adults. She did some extensive thinking of the phenomenon, and came up with her own unique solutions on it.

In 2013, TaraElla co-founded the Quarterlife Fightback project with several friends, who were also concerned about the quarter life crisis phenomenon in one way or another. TaraElla wrote this book with some help from her friends at the Quarterlife Fightback project. In turn, she hopes that this book will somehow help that project.

CHAPTER I. The Phenomenon of the Quarter Life Crisis

1.1 A Crisis Out There is Affecting Increasing Numbers of Young Adults

A crisis out there is affecting increasing numbers of young adults. A few years ago it wasn't even widely reported in the media, now they are beginning to shine a light on it, but many people still don't have a good idea of what it really is. To make matters worse, this lack of awareness means that many people suffering from it think they are alone in having such problems. There is also not much support in popular culture for those going through this kind of crisis.

The crisis can take several different forms. Here are a few examples:

Anna hates her current life, and is nostalgic about almost everything from when she was younger. Even those old, useless computer floppy disks can bring back a strong attack of nostalgia nowadays. When she was in high school she hated being there and couldn't wait to get away, but now she actually prefers that life and sometimes wishes there was a time machine to take her back there. Out of college for three years, she doesn't hate but doesn't really like her office job, and doesn't know what can reignite her passion for life. Some days it seems that life is no fun anymore, and all the good things about life can only be found in her past. Is that the way being 25 is supposed to be, she keeps asking herself.

David is 26. By day he works in a sandwich shop. He doesn't really want to work there, but doesn't know where else he can go. His job is also inadequate to pay his bills, and he had been evicted from his apartment more than

once in the past. Once upon a time, he dreamt of being a successful rock musician, but after playing in a local band during college it went nowhere, and eventually the band broke up. After that dream was shattered, he hasn't dared to dream big anymore.

Lucy works hard at a tech company, but has missed out on promotions for three years in a row now, whilst newer colleagues have already got theirs. At age 29, it seems that she will never be able to get to where she wants - to be a strong influence in the tech world. She feels that she may even stay in her position for a long time, wasting her next decade or so away. Although she already sleeps less than five hours every day, it really doesn't seem to have translated into results at the corporate level. She really doesn't know what she can do next.

Rachel is 30. She has been an avid follower of the entertainment and fashion worlds since she was a teenager. It was her natural home, she thought. In her college years and the few years after that she partied hard, and did not save much money. Now she is working from hand to mouth, in a small cafe just outside downtown. She also feels that the worlds of entertainment and fashion that she so loved is moving away from her, making her officially 'old'. Everyone there is now much younger than she is, and the styles don't seem to connect with her anymore like they did 10 or 15 years ago. Is 'life' over now?

These are all very different stories and experiences. But they are all examples of the Quarter Life Crisis. Professional psychologists and life coaches are just beginning to pay attention to this phenomenon, but because of how the cases vary and the difficulty in pinpointing the exact problem in many cases,

there have been many theories about the cause and the cure, some of which I believe are quite misguided. This book will present our theory of the cause and the 'cure' for the quarter life crisis. I believe that the difference with our theory is that whilst many other theories just go some way to relieve the lives of those going through the crisis, our theory is an attempt in restoring the wellbeing, energy and confidence that these people had before.

1.2 Symptoms of a Quarter Life Crisis

The symptoms of a quarter life crisis can vary a lot. Symptoms often include a feeling that life isn't turning out right, a fear of the future because life doesn't seem right there either, a fear of one's mortality and failing in one's life (which usually sounds crazy to older adults), indecision about life choices, a general feeling that things aren't right, and sometimes a crisis in self identity and self esteem.

Broadly speaking, the following are all potential symptoms of a quarter life crisis:

- Insecurity about one's life decisions
- Envy of other's lives

Dissatisfaction with current life, job, relationship and/or friendships

A feeling of being a failure in life

A feeling that life isn't what it should be

Severe and recurrent nostalgia

Feeling lost

Feeling trapped

Severe indecisiveness about almost everything

A feeling that something isn't right in life, even though everything is right in theory

Budget management issues

Wanting to just escape it all and do some crazy things

Frequent changes in jobs, residence and/or relationships

Crises about religion and spirituality

1.3 So What is Causing These Symptoms?

The reasons why people have a quarter life crisis is still under debate. It is usually recognised as stemming from unmet expectations and a difficulty in making future decisions in life. However, I believe there is another reason why these symptoms occur.

Taken together, the symptoms mentioned above actually sound like a combination of symptoms from the middle stages of the classical five stages of grief - anger, bargaining (dressed up as indecision and a desire to just do whatever crazy thing that comes to mind - but really it's just plain old bargaining if you think about it) and depression (which is why 'nothing feels particularly right' and why sometimes people have low energy during this period).

But what are these people actually grieving? Different people have different theories. Here's ours.

The majority of these people are yet quite far off from seriously needing to ponder their deaths, after all. What they are grieving is their youth, their feeling of specialness (which they were brought up to believe in), and the dreams they have had since childhood. Whilst dreams take longer to achieve nowadays, their self belief and their youthfulness would have set them up for life, to last the duration of this prolonged ride. However, for a combination of reasons (which we will explore in this website and in our upcoming book), society is stealing these things away from them prematurely, however, and with it their confidence to continue to dream also comes to an end. Although physically they are not old yet, with

this mindset they may as well be just going through the everyday motions of life whilst waiting out the rest of their days as old-hearted, dreamless people, for the rest of their lives. Although it will be quite a long time before they finally leave this Earth physically, spiritually they may as well already be living-dead people.

1.4 What Can We Do About the Quarter Life Crisis?

There are many books and websites talking about this phenomenon. We've read much of it ourselves. To us, they often take a much too passive and pessimistic attitude to the problem, however. The most often perspective taken is that this is almost a 'necessary suffering' of a modern young person, that it's alright and normal that we feel this way, that maybe we should even quit whatever we are doing in our lives and that it will be alright in the end if we do so. Meanwhile, we can make you feel better by distracting you with ideas about how great being 30 etc is because you are now more 'sophisticated' (Is that what we aim for in life? Really?), how fabulous it is that we no longer care so much about what others think about us (As if this really enough to compensate for the

permanent loss of the youthful spirit of endless dreams and opportunities), etc.

The fact is, without actually dealing with why 25, 30 or 35 year olds feel prematurely old, the only thing that they can do is to get us to accept our new oldness by making it look cool, i.e. at 30, although society has taken away your youthful spirit, at least you aren't as troubled by criticism from others, isn't that great? If I can use an analogy here, your life savings have been burnt in a fire, but I got you this Playstation you have always wanted since you were a kid, shouldn't you call yourself lucky? I really don't think so. ANYWAY

Society tends to think of 20-somethings and quite often 30-somethings as people who are young, vibrant, have a great lifestyle and an endlessly optimistic future. Almost every movie that features somebody in their 20s or early 30s

portrays their character in this light. After all, 30 is the new 20, and 40 is the new 30, right?

This kind of 'cure' sounds great on the surface. But to me, it smelled like a glorified version of letting you grieve 'healthily' but still not changing the outcome at all. Because the outcome isn't changeable to suit your needs in this model, what you are actually working towards is the final stage of grief - acceptance. This kind of cure, in other words, is just the kind of thing that people like me will run away from as quickly as possible.

In the rest of this book, I will outline a more thorough and more effective cure.

Basically, my view on the matter of the quarter life crisis is very different. It's alright that we feel this way, after all, it can't be not alright

when so many people are feeling it. But normal it ain't - it's just a generation-wide condition caused by circumstances in the outside world and the systems around us. And most importantly - we shouldn't just have to accept it. We are not ready to be old, we still have our dreams to chase, and you are not going to take it away from us. One day, we will have done what we need to do in life, we would have played the role we were born to play, and by then we will feel contentedly old, no grieving required. But before that, it's our right to act and feel young, and we need to fight back if you are stealing it away from us.

CHAPTER II. Quarter Lifers are not Broken - They are Confused by the World

2.1 The Messages Confusing Quarter Lifers

Quarter Lifers having serious doubts about their dreams and grieving their youth en masse sounds like a whole generation gone mad. To many quarter lifers themselves, having this sort of similar to midlife crisis experience in itself is very unreal for them. It's just not supposed to happen.

Yet I believe it is happening, because of the messages the outside world is sending them. These messages often come unintentionally, but they have powerful effects all the same. These messages include:

- 1) The media is telling them that they are old

The media is effectively telling them that they are old, in perhaps unintentional but very powerful and omnipresent ways. More will be explored about this twisted phenomenon in Chapter III.

2) Society, via parents, mentors and friends, is telling them to settle down and quit their youth, when they are not ready to

Traditionally, one is expected to have settled down by age 30. Yet, for many reasons, today's quarter life generation is not yet ready to do so (these reasons are justified, and will be explored in later sections). Yet it doesn't change the fact that society is telling them that it's time to settle down, and traditionally with settling down you quit your youth with all the wild dreams that come with it.

Today's late 20-somethings and 30-somethings are NOT ready to quit their youth, period. This message is a major part of what is causing their grief, I believe. I will explain why almost nobody is ready to be 'old' before 45 nowadays in Chapter III, Section 3.4.

3) Society is telling them that you haven't made it in the stakes of life, even though it's really too early to tell

Combined with the two messages above, the rise of extreme youth achievement in the form of under-30 CEOs and mega rich celebrities with an average age of 21 further reinforces the notion that it's time to give up your 'unrealistic' dreams for many quarter lifers. After all, those who were going to make it have made it already, and whilst you also had your fair share

of dreaming, you clearly haven't made it like them. What's the point of continuing to dream big?

The combined effect of these messages and other like them is essentially that you are too old to be young and have 'unrealistic' dreams now, let's talk about settling down and accepting your life as a regular, boring adult from now on. For a generation that was raised telling them that they are special, telling them that they can dream to be whatever they want to be and that they can make that dream come true if they work hard, this is truly a bitter pill to swallow. But gradually, the message is internalised, and that's when there is a quarter life crisis - when they 'realise' they have to accept this bitter reality, and grieve the stolen spirit of youth.

But let's look at the problem from a rational point of view. Should 20-somethings and 30-somethings really give up on their dreams and aim to be a regular average adult instead? Is there still any reason to maintain their dreams at this age?

2.2 The Quarter Life: Dreams and Aspirations at a Crossroads

Quarter Lifers are truly at a crossroads when it comes to their dreams and aspirations.

Although they are told to give it up in various not so subtle ways, part of them wants to hang on. They often try to be more 'practical' with their outlook in life, but then they really don't feel like doing that after all. Often it is trying to force themselves to be 'practical' and stop chasing their dreams that trigger a full blown quarter life crisis.

Often, the very 'choices' to be made in a quarter life crisis have something to do with continuing to chase your dreams vs completely stopping doing that altogether. If you are having or have had a quarter life crisis, examine the life choices

you are having difficulty with. There's a good chance that they relate to this very idea.

In fact, I believe this basic conflict is at the centre of most of the dilemmas arising out of a quarter life crisis.

I personally have had a quarter life crisis at some point in my life (earlier than usual), and I have come through it concluding that keeping your dreams alive is important, not just for now, but for your future too. I have also concluded that most of the factors pulling quarter lifers away from chasing their dreams are only illusions. I will deal with most of them in this book.

If it is your decision to give up on your dreams, then I am one to respect it. But I think that's a very sad outcome. In this book, therefore, I am

presenting the case of keeping your dreams alive in the first half, and I am devoting the second half to explore ways we can use to keep our dreams alive for the long ride ahead.

2.3 Extreme Youth Achievement: The Reality

In this day and age, it seems that if your dreams will come true it will happen at a much younger age than it did in previous generations. 20-year-old mega-rich celebrities and 25-year-old world changing CEOs are everywhere, and if you haven't heard of a few cases at least, you must be living under a rock.

The truth is, all this is an illusion, driven by two phenomenon: the entertainment industry's recent focus on the younger market, and the boom in computer related technologies. If you look carefully, most of the mega-rich by 25 people are either sports stars, or belong in one of the two categories mentioned above. Whilst sports stars and a few young celebrities are nothing new, this mass proliferation of young

rich celebrities and young rich IT CEOs is a recent phenomenon.

The entertainment industry has, in recent years, moved towards focussing strongly on the younger section of the market. We will explore this in more detail in Chapter III Section 3.3. But the effect of this is that you get to see mega-rich 20-year-old 'celebrities' on your TV almost daily. If you happen to be a struggling 30-year-old who still doesn't know what you want in life, that would be painful to watch. I've heard fellow 20-somethings complain of seeing some teenager making big money in the entertainment industry making them feel like an old failure so many times that it's not funny anymore. If you are one of these people, think about this: behind many of these teenage 'overnight successes' are a team of CEOs, producers, marketing experts, media tycoons and the like, who have access to all the major media channels to promote their products,

including the most popular TV shows, radio stations and magazines, not in one or two cities but as a network around the world. It's often more the 'success' of a team of middle aged men with lots of money and power that you are seeing, I would go as far to say. Which means there's nothing really to be amazed by there - most commercial success in this world belong to middle aged men with lots of capital and power, no matter what business they are in.

Similarly, the proliferation of young CEOs, often under 30, in the IT field, no less prominently seen than those teenage millionaires on TV, also adds to this feeling of ourselves falling behind in the stakes of life. Computers are maybe the only field where the CEOs can be this young. This is because computers are relatively new and their development has been at a rapid pace in the past few decades, making older generations on average LESS competent than younger adults in this area despite their

decades of life experience. It's probably the only area of life where this is the case, and eventually this trend will end too. Having said that, whilst the younger generation on average is more competent with computers, very few can really do something like invent a new search engine or a new social network. I personally have been into computers since a young age, many people (of my own generation) come up to me and ask me to fix their computers, but I couldn't have started Google or Facebook by a mile. There's being good at computers, and there's being expert enough to be able to invent something useful and translate this idea into practical use on a large scale. The vast majority of young people just don't belong there, because their life's work, their calling, is elsewhere. And if it's elsewhere, the gap for young CEOs to emerge isn't there, unlike in the IT industry. Another thing: even if you are really expert at writing code and setting up big complex websites, you need the capital to essentially start a

moderately sized company. This option is not available to the average computer geek - it is available only to people with good connections to the commercial world, and who are lucky enough to have the backing of investors before their project even has a chance to take off.

If you think about it carefully, extreme youth achievement is not a reality outside of these areas of life. It is a phenomenon that has not affected 99%+ of the world at all. It's like how just because the media has reported a few cases of people in their 20s dying of cancer in the past year doesn't mean that all 20-somethings should start seriously worrying about their risks of getting cancer. What I am saying is that we should ignore these examples of extreme youth achievement, because they represent cases that have emerged out of special circumstances. Notice that I said 'special circumstances' rather than 'extraordinary ability' - having 'extraordinary ability' is good

and often essential to extreme young success, but by itself, without the forces of circumstance that we explored above, will get you nowhere near there. Flipping this idea around, you can also say that even though somebody may not have achieved extreme success at an exceptionally young age, it doesn't mean that they don't have extraordinary abilities. It often is just that they weren't in the right circumstances to get into that fast lane, which is the case 99%+ of the time anyway.

So for the 99%+ of us who cannot get into the fast lane, what does chasing our dreams look like in this day and age? It takes a surprisingly long time, as we will see.

2.4 Dreams Actually Take Longer to Achieve Nowadays

Amongst all the illusions of extreme youth achievement being in reach for lots of young people, something is lost: for the 99% left out of the fast lane, dreams actually take longer to achieve in this day and age.

There are two reasons for this: we want more in life, and even if we didn't want more in life, the changes in society's structure mean that it takes longer just to get the basic necessities of life sorted anyway.

Let me be frank about one thing: we, as a generation, do want more in life than any other previous generation that has ever lived. We must face up to this fact, if we are to be realistic

about our long road ahead. A lot of us want so much out of life that it is impossible to settle down before 30 no matter how 'efficient' your life is. And we need not be guilty about this: all our lives we have been exposed to more choices, more opportunities and more possibilities in life than any generation that grew up before us. In the 1950s, young men mostly expected to work an average 9-to-5 job and bring home the bacon, and young women mostly expected to be housewives. There was not much of another choice for most of them. There was not only no opportunity to want something more out of life, most people didn't realise that you COULD want something more out of life. But our generation grew up differently. We have always known that we COULD want something more out of life, and most of us would not settle for an average 9-to-5 or housewife existence.

Wanting more out of life may be natural for our generation, but it comes at a cost too, like everything else. It's like if you want to buy a bigger house you have to pay more. The cost of wanting more out of life is that the road between the start of your adulthood and your destination in life is going to be longer. If you want to make an impact on this world, or even if you just want to climb a few rungs of the corporate ladder, it's going to take longer than just aiming to get and hold down an average 9-to-5 job. There's no shortcut around this.

What's more is that for some of today's young people, not only do they want to dream big, they haven't quite figured out what their life's work is about yet. Again, in the 1950s there may not have been many possibilities to choose from, but it is very different today. In this world of so many possibilities, whilst some people may be able to pinpoint that one thing that is their calling before they even reach adulthood,

others may have to search for a while before they find it. It's OK - it's like how some people find their life partner right out of college and others only find their soulmate in their 40s or beyond. Whenever there is a process of choice and searching for the right answer to make the right choice, some people are going to take longer than others. This again may contribute to a longer time to turn dreams into reality.

There's also the effect of society-wide changes. For example, if home ownership is on your to-do list, that one is going to take quite a bit longer than forty years ago. The cost of a house has gone up so much that no matter how big your salary is you cannot hope to complete that one in the same timeframe like you could in the 1970s. The longer road to one's destiny also means that many 20-somethings are unwilling to settle down. If you want to find a lifelong partner who is sure they are going to commit

for life, that goal again often has to be moved to the 30s to be realistic.

Society's refusal to acknowledge that dreams take longer to achieve nowadays means that many young people actually don't realise it. They become too harsh on themselves, measuring themselves against a timeline that is quite impossible to do. They also frequently burn out well before they reach their destination, as they haven't been psychologically prepared for the long ride ahead, and often lose the requisite youthful spirit well before they can afford to do so. In this book, one of the most important things we will look at is how to sustain this spirit of youth for the long ride that chasing your dreams mean these days.

2.5 This is What You Have to Survive Now

So you're stuck in this dead end job, have an unsatisfactory relationship (or no relationship), feel powerless to do anything about it, and I am telling you that dreams now take longer to achieve so don't except to get there until your late 30s or your 40s? Do I really want to get you depressed? Can't I just say that, once that you have survived your own three years of the Quarter Life Crisis, everything is going to be fine and my 30s are going to be magical?

Unfortunately, I am just telling the truth. Dreams do take long to achieve, and I don't sugarcoat things.

But fortunately, this doesn't mean that you have a decade or more of despair in front of you. Far from it. From my experience, although people don't generally emerge from their Quarter Life Crisis having all their dreams fulfilled, some people are able to regain some spirit of optimism and find a way to balance their lives. They eventually go on to make their dreams come true. What I am saying that, the solution to the quarter life crisis is not finding an instant ticket to your dreams, because you won't be able to find one, but to find a way to allow yourself to not be burnt out, to keep your spirit of youth alive, and to keep your dreams alive until they are achieved.

Cast your memory back to high school. There's quite a large chance that you didn't want to be there too. You may even have nostalgic memories about it now, but at that time you didn't want to be there. Yet you survived it, and in hindsight, it wasn't that bad (or why else are

you nostalgic about it?). The road towards your destination in life is the same. Each day on this long road there may be things that you don't want to do, there may be frustrations here and there, and you may develop severe self doubt along the way too. Yet, as long as you know you will get out of here, and have hope about a brighter future fuelled by your dreams, you will survive, like you did in high school. And whilst you will be wanting to get to your destination as soon as possible, the days before you get there may not be bad at all - just like although you wanted to get out of high school as soon as possible, in hindsight it wasn't that bad.

To sum it up, the bad news is that the long road towards feeling accomplished is something you will have to survive. The good news is that, with the right strategy, you will survive it well, and eventually you will get there. The strategy is both in your mindset and in the things you do in everyday life. The rest of this book is dedicated

to such strategies. They include kicking
poisonous way of thinking, strategies to sustain
the optimism of youth and the capacity to
dream through a long, sometimes difficult time,
and how to continue to believe in yourself when
the rest of the world no longer believes in you.

CHAPTER III. Are We Old Yet?

3.1 Trust Me, there are Many 20-somethings and 30-somethings Feeling Old Out There

Society tends to think of 20-somethings and quite often 30-somethings as people who are young, vibrant, have a great lifestyle and an endlessly optimistic future. Almost every movie that features somebody in their 20s or early 30s portrays their character in this light. After all, 30 is the new 20, and 40 is the new 30, right?

Apparently, out there in the land of the real world, 25 may as well be the new 50. If I could have ten dollars every time I hear somebody under 35 spoke about how old they felt now, I would probably have enough money to buy a car with the money now. If this phenomenon were isolated instead, we may not need to pay attention to it - I am sure there is the odd

otherwise healthy teenager out there who thinks that their best days are over and that they are prematurely old, but since such cases are thankfully still uncommon, we can't see it as a society-wide problem. But with people around 25 or older, complaints of feeling old, whilst not really universal, are still indeed common.

Most 25 to 40 year olds do not really suffer from the physical effects of aging that much - apart from an inability to party all night and an inability to consume too much alcohol. But you really can't pinpoint aging on that - after all, teenagers also cannot (are not allowed to) party all night or drink alcohol. My point is, it's very possible to live a young lifestyle without these things. Still, when so many 25 year olds think they are getting old, it certainly can't just boil down to their individual imaginations or just the fact that they can't party all night anymore. So what's causing their feeling?

I think there are two main reasons. Firstly, the media has become extremely skewed towards youth. Unlike any other time in living memory, people well under 25 now make up most of the major icons in the Western popular culture. For example, 2013 was called 'the year of Miley Cyrus' by many people - yet she was only 21 that year! This is actually not normal, and as I will argue later on, not healthy. But many 20-somethings really have nothing to compare to - this is the only way popular culture can be that they know. But why is this the case, and how may we be able to mitigate the effects, and hopefully in the longer run change this situation? I will explore this in the next section.

The other reason I think has to do with the fact that dreams now take longer to achieve, but society hasn't adjusted to this yet. There are numerous reasons for this. Also, it is especially

ironic and unhelpful that some people have been led to believe that dreams are taking shorter to achieve, because of the proliferation of young celebrities, and young CEOs like Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg. I will visit this paradox, and the reasons why dreams are actually taking longer to achieve, in the sections after the next.

3.2 It's Not Hard to Feel Old When the Culture is Skewed Towards Extreme Youth

To the middle aged and older, it may be unimaginable that being in your 20s can even be considered 'old'. But then they do not live in the world where the coolest people have an average age of 21 or so. What twisted world is this? It's the world of popular culture, the world largely created by the entertainment industry. Although it's true that not everyone identifies extensively with popular culture, popular music and celebrities and their role in setting the barometer for 'cool' in our culture cannot be denied. Therefore, their role in sending out the message that you are too old to be cool at 30 really cannot be denied.

Young people are attracted to the world of popular culture, often before they are teenagers. It's there they get their voice and their identity as youths. In high school, what music you listen to or what celebrities you identify with is a huge part of your identity. For many years in their lives, the entertainment industry had produced the soundtracks to their lives, the movies that defined the culture of their generation and their subcultures, even the language that defines their speech. Although it's actually produced by a multi-billion dollar industry, teenagers tend to think that popular culture is theirs to own.

But time passes, and it passes quickly. Suddenly, when you find yourself in your mid-20s, you are well above the average age of the cool people in the music and cultural scenes. What's more is that the whole culture becomes geared towards a younger generation, and becomes something you can no longer identify with. The cool people

nowadays speak a different language, and seem to be talking about a different culture altogether. It's not uncommon to hear people around 25 or so saying things like 'kids these days don't know what music really is', and it's not logic defying either - there's a different generation with different tastes out there, and they are the ones being catered to by the culture out there, in the very same scenes that used to cater to OUR culture. It's like you have been kicked out of the cool scene.

It may not be everyone's ultimate goal in life to be 'cool', but being told by the media that effectively you are uncool because of your age is like being told, via loudspeakers that are omnipresent in your life, that you are old. There's no sweeter way of saying this, unfortunately.

A few decades back things were quite different. The average age of people making it in the entertainment and popular cultural scenes was quite a bit higher, for starters. Even in that industry, it used to be that you matured and your career matured in your 30s and 40s, nowadays at that age you are usually considered too old to be still relevant to popular culture. And it's hard to imagine this would not produce knock-on effects in society.

3.3 Why is the Culture Skewed Towards Extreme Youth

So we have now established that the popular culture, driven by the media and largely controlled by a multi-billion dollar industry, is heavily skewed towards extreme youth, with serious consequences for the rest of society. But the next question is, why is it so? And will it change any time soon?

Different people have given different answers to this question. But there is one central reason for all this, I believe: MONEY. It may not explain everything you are seeing out there, but it sure is a major part of the puzzle, I believe. You see, most companies exist mainly to make money. Most of the entertainment and popular cultural industry exists not because people like music,

movies and celebrities, but because there's money to be made.

Let's use the music industry as an example. Now think about the last time you bought a CD. What did it cost? Somewhere around \$20 to \$30, maybe. If you downloaded it online, it would have been even cheaper. You see, CDs don't sell for much, and therefore by extension must not earn the industry much. The costs of producing the CDs, getting the advertising out (and advertising is everything these days, so they do spend a lot on this), and other associated costs may often not even be recovered by people like you buying the CDs. Things like tours and concerts is where the big money actually comes in.

Now think about it: did you go to a concert recently? How many did you go to in the past year? If you are over 25 or so, it's quite likely

that you haven't been to a concert in a while, and that you didn't really go to that many in the past year. You have work to do, after work and on weekends you just want to relax and meet your friends for brunch, and in fact, you just cannot stand the screaming teenagers and early-20s crowds bound to be present at concerts anyway.

And then there's another thing: if you went to a concert recently, did you go to one of a mega popular artist, one that the industry has poured lots of advertising money to support? Chances are you did not. You may even have attended the concert of an unsigned artist, and many of your favourite artists may indeed be unsigned or indie. Years ago you concluded that the stuff the industry was promoting was overrated, and there are better things to be found elsewhere. Today, you just think it has become even more true. Speaking for myself, I have maintained a personal music chart since I was a teenager.

Back in 2002, most chart toppers were what they were promoting on radio. But by 2013, there were probably more unsigned chart toppers than there were radio promoted chart toppers.

These days, in my opinion, chart hits are often created rather than arise naturally. It starts with overwhelming airplay. The few weeks before and after a chart hit is released, there would be overwhelming airplay everywhere you go. Often, even my mother, who does not listen to the radio much, would start singing these hits to herself when she is reading or working. Why? She was 'forced' to listen to it when doing her shopping. You see, a lot of supermarkets and grocery stores have the radio on too. And when certain hits are played every hour on almost every top 40 format station, you would have to be living under a rock not to have it imprinted in your mind. After the imprinting comes the hype. At that point, many minds which are more

vulnerable to outside influence would begin to believe they actually like the song in question, and when this happens with enough songs over a period of time, they actually believe that they like the artist in question. Next they are getting their concert tickets, and when enough people do that, the industry makes a lot of money.

Again, if you are over 25 or so, the above process usually does not apply to you. Surely, you may like a radio hit or two every now and then. But surely, you can't be bothered to really like all the crap that they play on the radio over and over again whilst you drive to and from work every day. But younger minds are more easily influenced. They have often not been exposed to as much music, they will more easily believe the hype that the media creates around everything, and their music tastes are also more malleable. And there's this thing about searching for an identity and needing a shared identity with their peers. Therefore, if you

convert enough people to be 'fans' in that age group, you reach a tipping point where it just spreads like wildfire. It's really the stuff of dreams for a mass production entertainment industry whose primary goal is to rake in as much profits as possible. Surely, not all teenagers and early-20s people are like that, but there are enough out there to make this business model very profitable.

The fact is that, even though over 25s make up most of the population, from a entertainment industry's money making point of view, things may be a bit different. Most over 25s just don't go to concerts enough for the industry to care too much about them. Over 25s, when viewed as a market segment, do not make them the big money. The younger market is where the money is to be made. They are the ones to appeal to. And the best way of appealing to a population is by making them identify with whatever you are promoting, thinking in the

mindset of and speaking the language of the people you are trying to appeal to. Therefore, the entertainment industry doesn't really speak with the voice of the whole society. It doesn't even speak with the voice of 'young people in society' in general (which should at least include all under-40s). It most often speaks with the voice of those it wishes to appeal to - teenagers and people in their early-20s.

Now think back to when you were a teenager. You probably thought that old people were uncool too. If you didn't, you almost surely knew some friends who did. And amongst you and your friends, 'old' used to be defined quite differently too. People who are over 30 were so old and uncool to you back then. You surely didn't think of 35 year olds as your peers, right? Chances are they were closer to your parent's age than your age, which made them even more uncool. If you want to sell to the younger market, there really is no point in using a 35

year old as the face of your product most of the time. It's like if a company wants to sell a product to young women, the last person they would want to use would be an elderly man. This is why the media is full of 'ultra cool and popular celebrities' whose average age would be around 21, and why most of them are doomed to disappear from the public radar in the next 10 or so years.

In the real world, almost nobody has accomplished much at 21, but in this heavily skewed media driven culture, people peak at 21, because that's the best way money can be made for the industry, even if this really distorts reality. Surrounded by a culture where people peak at 21 and fade away by 35 or so, we can begin to think of ourselves as old, even when we are only about a third of the way through an average life expectancy. Seeing that the culture that we used to identify with as teenagers and the celebrities we used to like are all long gone

from the public radar, living in an age where they have been prematurely swept away and are to be found in places of nostalgia only, we become resigned to talking about the 'good old times' like 70 year olds. But what we need to remember is this, it's all very distorted and crazy, and shouldn't influence our perception of the reality.

3.4 But When are You Old?

I have been talking about premature aging up to this point. But unless we have a solid idea of when and how people actually become 'old people', any talk of premature aging is on shaky ground. After all, I can argue that Australia really isn't located down under at the southern end of the world but at the centre of the world, and that countries in the northern hemisphere have drawn the equator at the wrong place. But then science can easily refute me in that case.

So where do we draw the line between 'young' and 'old'? Is it 40? 50? Or 60?

I actually believe being old is not a number, but a life stage you enter when you are ready to. When 25 year olds get told that they are old, it

often causes a crisis (as we have been talking about so far). When 40 year olds get told that they are old, it doesn't cause such a major crisis usually, but they surely don't like it much either. But when a 70 year old gets told that they are old, chances are that they would be willing to accept it as a matter of fact. The typical 70 year old doesn't enjoy the physical limitations of being old, like lower mobility, back pain and having to take their medication every day, but they are probably not that bothered to be considered by society as old people.

I believe people are content to accept the label 'old' when they are ready. This would be when they have done what they set out to do in life, and have played the role they were born to play. This surely can be said of most 70 year olds out there, hence their contentment with being old. At 40, chances are that you have only very partially achieved the above contentment, hence you don't want to be old yet. At 25,

chances are that you haven't even fully explored your dreams and your own narrative in life, to be told that you are old is like being told that life is almost over even before it really had a chance to bloom. In other words, you are old and are contented to be so when you feel that you have done your life's work. To tell a 25 or a 40 year old that they are old is simply illogical and cruel, even if that is what our media is effectively saying.

Old is settled, content and accomplished then. The opposite of 'old' is 'young'. If that's the case, then young must carry with it ideas of being unsettled, not yet content and wanting more in life. Because being old is settled and content, it is calm and charming in its own way, and not only the people who are ready to be old can appreciate that, we the not-yet-old can also appreciate these qualities in old people. Because being young is unsettled and unsatisfied, it carries with it an energy to do

things, an energy to dream, an energy to achieve. In other words, the state of being 'young' carries with it the required energy to do what it takes to become accomplished and contented in life, and when the work is done, this energy ceases and is replaced by a calm contented feeling that is the state of being 'old'. In life, if you want to live it fully, first you need to be young and fully embrace that spirit of being young by embracing your dreams and going for it with all your energy. Then, when your life's work is done, you will enter into a contented old age. The more you are able to embrace being young, the more you are able to have a contented, golden old age.

Therefore it is important for young people to embrace being young, and it is truly toxic that some sections of the culture are making them feel old. This is why we must fight back against the distortion.

Whilst the media is effectively making many people feel prematurely old nowadays, paradoxically slogans like '40 is the new 30' and '30 is the new 20' are becoming increasingly popular. Are they merely lies we tell ourselves, probably as a way to cope with this distortion, as some have suggested, or do they have some truth in them? We will explore this in the next section.

3.5 Thirty is the New Twenty, and Forty is the New Thirty

30 is the new 20, we often people say. And 40 is the new 30 too, apparently. Many people have laughed at these slogans, as if they are silly things people say. After all, physically 30 cannot really be the new 20, right? And a 40 year old will always look and function like a 40 year old, no matter if it's 2014, 1984 or 1954, right? They are just things people say to cope with getting older in a youth obsessed culture, making this difficult reality easier to swallow, right?

Physically, thirty is the new twenty really makes no sense, I agree. But socially, it makes perfect sense. Why? As we concluded in the last section, people need to be 'young' so that they have the energy to achieve their life's work, and then when they feel accomplished they can

enter old age contentedly. In a previous section we also concluded that people actually generally take longer to find their dreams, to work towards their goals, and to do their life's work to their contentment. That naturally means that people NEED to remain in the state of being young for a longer period than ever before in human history. A longer life expectancy has made that convenient too, but the driver behind this really is the delay in being accomplished in this day and age, rather than the fact that many people live into their 80s and beyond.

Many people have a strong reluctance, consciously or subconsciously, to embrace this concept of an extended youth. After all, this goes against our logical upbringing. Many things in this world have an absolute value that is objective and unchanging. Your ten dollar note cannot be extended into twenty dollars after all. This leads many people to think that any

extension in the state of being young is purely wishful thinking from those who do not want to age gracefully. But as we have established, the states of being 'young' and 'old' shouldn't be defined by absolute numbers, but should be seen as two different life stages. Unlike your age, which is a simple mathematical calculation whose formula stays constant throughout history, life stages are relative, and in different periods of human history, different life stages have emerged (and more rarely some have been erased). The life stage of being a teenager, for example, only emerged during the last century, even though it seems to be just part of common sense nowadays. Even though it wasn't there for most of human history, for our generation the extended youth is real - you can embrace it, or if you don't, you will be forcing yourself to grow old before your time, a truly bitter experience.

Therefore, not only should you shut out the media's ridiculous 'unintended message' about 25 or 30 year olds being too old to be cool, you really should embrace the extended youth philosophy too. By embracing it you will have the energy and hopeful spirit to chase your dreams down the long ride that it usually takes in this era. In this day and age, voluntarily ceasing to be young before the age of 40 is absolutely stupid, and youth should last well into the 40s in many people's cases.

But with the media effectively pushing over-25s into the old box, how can we fight back? This will be the theme of the next few sections.

CHAPTER IV. Don't Want to be Prematurely Old? It's Fightback Time

4.1 When you were younger, why were you happier?

If you wish to achieve a goal, you need to be very clear about what it is first. Therefore, if our goal is to maintain the spirit of youth in ourselves and in our culture, firstly we have to pin down what that spirit really is.

Many 20-somethings and 30-somethings have reported that they feel LESS happy than when they were younger. Which is kind of surprising, because they now have an income to spend, don't have to deal with the bullying and other crappy aspects of high school anymore, and they may even have a stable relationship and a family. Back in high school, many of them just wished that they could get out of that place as soon as possible, and get some money of their own to spend. Now that they have all that and

more, even if things are a bit stressful sometimes (paying bills, difficult bosses and clients at work, etc), shouldn't they be at least a bit happy? For many people, the answer is no. In fact, they have become nostalgic about high school, that place they once wanted to leave behind forever.

It's not like life was any easier back then, either. Sure, you had your parents looking after your every need, you didn't have to deal with exorbitant bills that threaten to put you into debt all the time, you probably got away with working less hard than you do now, but then there were bullies and the cool groups vs outcasts problem everywhere, your finances were controlled by your parents and you basically had no freedom at all. Some of you also had to deal with teachers you didn't like, who may be no less difficult than the boss you have now.

So what was different? What made back then more tolerable than right now? I've tried to answer this question for many years, and the one thing it comes down to is what I call the vista of youth. The vista of youth is endless hope, endless possibilities, and a space wide enough to hold the wildest dreams. Whilst being in high school was no fun for many people, the vista of hope kept them alive. Sadly, this vista has often been eroded quite badly by the time people reach their late-20s or their 30s. By this time, they have seen other people get ahead whilst they are languishing in failure land, chalking up failure after failure. By this time, the media driven culture has effectively made it clear that they are too old to be cool. All this combines to make that dream seem all that more impossible than it once seemed.

But as we have concluded from previous sections, all those things are illusions. The truth is that in your 20s and 30s, you are still on your way down the long road to chase down your dreams. If at this time you lose the vista of youth, and therefore lose the youthful spirit it brings to your life, you lose the will to travel on and fight on, like a soldier who loses their will to carry on in a battlefield, who just falls to the ground and die right there. Isn't that sad? If you don't want that to happen to you, you must fight to keep your vista of youth fresh all the time until you reach your destination in life. Next we will talk about how to do just that.

4.2 The Essence of Youth: The Vista of Lots of Time, and we can Dream Anything

Many people around the world have tried to capture the essence of being young, and in the case of those who believe they are growing old before their time, to regain the essence of being young. People have done all sort of paradoxical things, like trying to catch up with the current fashions even if they don't like it, whilst indulging in the music from decades ago, just to regain that spirit of being young. Some have even opted to have lots of plastic surgery - but that just made them look very plastic.

Make no mistake: the essence of youth is not in any fashion, music or the way you look physically. An old fashioned and unattractive young person is not less young because of the

way they are, after all. The essence of youth is in the way one views the world, their own life, their place in the world, and their own future in it. The essence of youth is seeing and believing in a vista where there is a lot of time and space to dream in front of you. The essence of youth is being unafraid to dream, being unafraid of failure and instability. The essence of youth is, above all, having the freedom, the confidence and the energy to dream big.

4.3 Regaining the Essence of Youth

The key to regaining the essence of youth is to regain the capacity to dream big. This capacity may have been eroded by encountering and realising the difficult aspects of life, and the many injustices and limitations this world has. We need to regain this capacity if we are to enjoy the spirit of being young again.

Some people believe that if you have lost the essence of youth, it is difficult, if not impossible, to regain it. They generally come from the point of view that once you have lost your innocence about this world, it becomes very difficult to regain the hope and optimism associated with youth. They generally come from the point of view that young people only have that great

capacity to dream because they have an overly rosy view of the world, that innocence is bliss.

I cannot disagree more here.

Whilst I do agree that innocence is lost it cannot be regained, the same cannot be said about one's capacity to dream, and to turn these dreams into reality. Whilst by their mid-20s most people would already know that the world is quite imperfect, and the playing field is far from level in many areas, it doesn't mean one cannot still dream big. After all, things like gender equality were largely dreamt up and then put into practice by people who were mature and realistic in their thinking.

Knowing the difficult aspects of reality should not stop you from dreaming big, it should just mean that the contents of your dreams and the

plan you follow to turn them into reality needs to take into account these aspects of life. For example, one difficult reality we have to live with in this era is that dreams tend to take longer than before to be achieved in one's life. Another is that multi billion dollar industries run almost every part of this world, and the preferences, culture and actions of many people are under the control of economic interests. They are not easy things to accept, but we just have accept these facts. What we can do is to 'train' our minds to be able to dream big even as we are very aware of the limitations of this world.

For example, knowing that dreams take long to achieve in the present era means that you have to adjust your timeframe in your game plan accordingly. However it doesn't take away from the fact that you can still have similar dreams compared with if you didn't know this fact.

In fact, only those who can dream big whilst being aware of the pitfalls of reality can turn their dreams into reality. Being aware of the difficulties and limitations you will encounter means that you have a much more solid game plan in life. Isn't that a good thing?

In Chapter V, I will talk more about dreaming big in a very imperfect world.

4.4 The Culture: What we can Do About It - Link to Keep Your Dreams Alive

Now, let us briefly turn our attention back to the culture around us again. After all, the culture around us affects all of us in an important way, and we have concluded before that it currently has the harmful effect of forcing people into premature aging.

Can the culture change? Yes and no. The reality is that the entertainment industry operates based on profit, like any other industry. If the market situation does not change, the marketing strategies of that industry is not likely to change either. If we want its message to be inclusive of everyone, then we must get more 20-somethings, 30-somethings and 40-somethings to attend concerts and buy related

stuff. Here we have a vicious cycle situation. Most of the very visible popular cultural icons out there today do not appeal much to people over 25, as a result of the industry's current focus on the ultra young end of the market. Who are they going to rally around, whose concerts will they be going to then, even if we can get enough over 25s to realise that it is in their cultural interest to increase their participation in the entertainment industry's market? I guess this will take a while to sort out, unfortunately. Therefore, don't expect things to suddenly change next year, for example.

Meanwhile, even if the culture 'out there' cannot be changed, you can change the culture 'around you'. After all, we are not generally affected by culture 'out there', we are affected by culture 'around us'. Culture that is 'out there' but not that much 'around us' may as well be like the culture in Thailand or Japan to us - it may enter our consciousness and lives in some

ways, but in the end it is distant and foreign, and does not have much of an effect on our lives.

So how do we change the culture around us? Firstly, we have to realise that whilst the entertainment industry does affect the most visible parts of our popular culture to a very great degree, it does not control ALL culture. Even if some of the currently most visible stuff does not sit well with us, there is plenty more to choose from. We retain the right to choose what comes into our lives, and dismiss what is irrelevant. If the most visible parts of popular culture send the message that we are too old to be cool, or that it's time to give up and 'settle down', then so what? It's not MY culture. Just like we do not choose to be around frenemies who harm us more than they do good, we can choose not to be indoctrinated by a culture that sends out harmful messages. That doesn't mean you need to start 'living under a rock'. It just

means that you need a balance of messages in your life. You are inevitably going to be affected by the distorted 'you are old' message out there, so make sure you have enough of the 'you can dream big and there's more than enough time to make it' messages in your life. It's like how you need enough healthy food in your life to balance out the junk food you inevitably eat over the course of your days, or how you need enough days of relaxation to balance out the inevitably stressful ones.

Speaking about the part of culture that is not backed up by the entertainment industry, here's something for you to think about? How about that favourite artist of yours from 10 years ago? Haven't heard of them for the past 5 or so years? It's likely that they are still making music somewhere out there, but have been forced to go independent. Seek them out and you are likely to find that they are still actively making new stuff. The culture of 'the past' actually lives

on, you see, even if it's been forced into premature irrelevancy from an industry point of view.

CHAPTER V. Keeping Your Dreams Alive

5.1 Dreams are Essential for Youth Culture

If the essence of youth is a boundless view of time, space and opportunity allowing for the wildest dreams in life to be made, then it should follow that dreams are essential for youth culture. And I believe this to be true. Let us have a more detailed look to see if this is really the case.

A recurrent theme in the culture of being young is simply that you have the ability to do pretty much everything you want to. From Billie Piper's *Because We Want To* in 1998 to Katy Perry's *Roar* in 2013, the music of youth celebrates this idea very well. Movies celebrate this idea as well. Movies from *Spiderman* to *Transformers* are all about unlikely people

becoming heroes, doing previously unimaginable great things.

Another manifestation of this is in its talk about relationships. A lot of music and movies have that theme where somebody is able to get the unlikely dream boyfriend or girlfriend, either as the main theme or an important sub-plot.

Yet another manifestation is in those movies about having a big adventure, the most popular settings being a road trip with friends or an overseas adventure. There are too many movies here to name, really.

As you can see, the spirit of dreaming big is not just present as a part of being young, it is interwoven into every aspect of life, and appears in different forms in different parts of culture or life. It is omnipresent.

Put it simply: if you want to regain the spirit of youth, the spirit of dreaming big must be omnipresent in your life and your culture.

5.2 Your Dreams that 'Never Came True'

Perhaps once you too were influenced by that dreaming big culture, and some time ago you dared to dream big. And then the dream never came true. You became so disappointed that you stopped dreaming, and now actively avoid that dreaming big culture. In other words, you would rather become old prematurely rather than get hurt again. You just can't let yourself get hurt again. Perhaps you also know quite a few friends in the same situation too.

That really doesn't surprise me much. I know quite a few friends who feel the same way too.

Let me ask you one thing: how long did you give that dream to come to fruition? One year?

Maybe two or three years? After all, in the movies dreams always come true in a year or two, or even sooner, right? Therefore, if it hasn't come true in three years or so, it's surely time to quit, right? By the way, it wasn't just that it hadn't come true in three years, I worked so hard during this period and have absolutely nothing to show for it. Shouldn't I just quit trying?

The truth is, there's a great chance that the dream which 'never came true' wasn't doomed, you just gave up too soon. As I said before, dreams take much longer to achieve nowadays, even though ironically people these days have much less patience.

When you think about it, working hard on something for five years or more and having nothing to show for it isn't really unusual nowadays. It also makes perfect sense. When

you have a dream and you set out to achieve it, you have almost unlimited hope and energy that you can pour into it. But the world is so big and complex nowadays, and there are so many possibilities everywhere. Just searching through these possibilities and opportunities to find the right path for you can take years. And with a complex system comes more barriers too. This applies to relationships, careers, and goals of all types. Realistically, you may need to work on something for ten years or more before you see some results, and it may take even longer for you to feel like 'you have arrived'. Meanwhile, if you don't have the right strategy and the right worldview, your energy and optimism can fizzle out within a few years, when you are likely just at the beginning of the long journey.

Popular culture is unhelpful here again. I guess movies generally have a limited time frame, and it also sounds not hopeful enough from a marketing perspective if dreams are shown to

unfold throughout many years. But way too many movies show dreams that come true within a year or two, and that has created unrealistic expectations in many people, similar to teenage millionaire celebrities and 20-something IT CEOs. The fictional world is reinforcing an illusion of the real world here, and it just makes the possibility of almost overnight success all the more real. But it is ultimately unhelpful, because people inevitably find that their dreams haven't come true yet two years down the road, and that false hope turns to despair.

Therefore, it's time to set yourself free from the dreaming prison now. If you have a dream that 'never came true', it's time to have a look at it again. Surely, many years may have passed, and conditions may be very different in your life and in your worldview. You may need to adjust many parameters of the dream. But if you still believe in the spirit of the dream, the essence of

it, that is all that matters. It's time to give your dream(s) another go.

5.3 When the Outside World Destroys your Dreams Without Even Trying

The outside world is often hostile to your dreams. In fact, it is a hazard for your dreams, which stand a high chance of being killed either slowly or quickly by this outside world if you don't protect them well. And it does all this without even trying.

For example, if you believe that you need a promotion at work now to get to where you want to get to, and nobody decides to give you that promotion, your dreams may just die quite a bit. When you write a 600 page novel and nobody even wants to read a page of it, that would also seriously harm your dreaming spirit for some time. The fact is that they probably wanted a specific person for the new opening,

or that people were too busy to read your novel, especially amongst 1000+ other ones to choose from, but that never makes anything better, right?

The world is one giant, inhumane machine that get things done every day when viewed from a certain angle. Life goes on, but the system never cares about how many people are destroyed by it. This is the reality of a world that has become so big and so complex, with various established interests running every part of the system.

There's no denying it.

But it is up to you to protect your dreams, especially when it may face some darker times. It is up to you to keep them alive and healthy, so they can keep your life energized. In the next few sections, I will talk about how to protect and nurture your dreams.

5.4 Taking your Dreams Outside of the System

As we discussed in the last section, the world, when taken as a whole, can often be seen as being run by one big impersonal and unemotional system that 'just works' but will sometimes quash your dreams without even trying. Realising this, one great way to protect and nurture your dreams is to take as much of it 'outside the system' as possible.

But what is 'in the system' and what is 'outside the system'? Anything that requires input or approval from established interests as an essential ingredient for success is relying on part of 'the system', I believe. If your life goals are that you want to travel the world or write a novel that other people will want to read, they really don't rely much on any company,

government or any established interests, if you think about it. Surely, it may take some time and money, but you can work towards it with your own effort. But if your dream relies on a series of promotions within a corporate or political hierarchy, then they essentially rely on the decisions of powerful people in charge of different parts of the system. I am not saying that those dreams are any less valid, it's just that putting all your dreaming eggs in a basket like those is a big risk to take in life. It essentially sets you up to have a high risk of being quashed in spirit.

Fortunately, there are many ways of achieving the same kind of dream in this world, and usually not all of them need to involve 'the system' that much. For example, if your dream is to 'make a difference in the technology world', you can either work for a tech company, hope to climb up the ranks there, and eventually influence the kind of products it

makes or the ethics it conducts its business by. But another way of doing it is to learn some programming yourself, and write and release your own dream software. Yet another way is by starting a tech blog, and sharing around ideas that may help shape the tech sphere. The difference is that first way relies on the system, and the other two ways don't. You mileage may vary even with the two ways that don't rely on the system, but it's not like another year without a promotion can quash your spirit so easily. In this world where dreams take so long to achieve, it's really an advantage not to be subjected to barrier after barrier where you may be quashed by the system each time.

I am not saying that you should give up your dreams that are somewhat tied to the system. What I am saying is that, you may need to develop other dreams in parallel, if your primary dream is tied to the system. This way, your dreaming spirit cannot be easily quashed

by some random corporate decision, perhaps caused by some random economic event. This alone will make you feel much better about yourself in the longer run, trust me.

5.5 You need a Roadmap, and Some Priorities

With dreams taking longer than ever to achieve, the ride can seem long and dark at times.

Having an all or none approach can add to this. This is where you have one big end goal, which probably won't be achieved until 10 or 20 years later. Meanwhile, you will have a decade or two of feeling not achieved, desperately asking 'are we there yet'. This could be enough to zap your spirit out before you can get to the end.

Therefore, there are two things I wouldn't recommend a person to set out on their journey of dreams without: a roadmap, and a sense of priorities.

The first thing is to get your priorities right. You want that package that is your ultimate goal at the end, but you have to decide which parts of it you really want the most, and which parts of it must come before the others. Set out on achieving these first.

Say your goal is to live in New York City and write a book about it. However, you currently live in a small town in New Zealand, and don't even have the money to travel to New York to have a look at the place. Your two first goals may be to familiarise yourself with New York, its landmarks, its culture and the way people think about it, and get a higher paying job so you can save some money for your eventual move. With the internet nowadays, it is very easy to get somewhat familiar with big global destinations like New York. You can get familiar with where things are in the city for a start. Google maps or any other mapping application can be useful for that. You may try to get into Street View and

'walk' a block or two to get a sense of how the places connect together on the street level. You would also try to read the many articles people write about New York. Articles like 50 Things I Love About New York or 40 Reasons to Hate New York, or even things like 30 Signs You Grew Up in Manhattan can be very useful sources of information for you. It will take years to go through all of that and get it absorbed into your brain, trust me. Meanwhile, during your day, you may like to start looking for a job if you don't already have one, or look for a second job or a higher paying one. You may decide to return to education so that you can get even higher paying jobs later on.

Then you need to draw up a roadmap. Using the example above, once you have saved some money, your next step may be to move to Auckland, the largest city in New Zealand, to get a feel of how city life is like. Auckland may be a lot smaller than New York, but it has

skyscrapers, international food and lots of business activity, some of the experiences you will find in New York. It may help you get used to New York when you eventually get there. An alternative would be to take a two month holiday in a nearby large multicultural city like Sydney, Australia, which also has all these things, perhaps on a slightly larger scale. Meanwhile, you will want to continue to connect with the cultural phenomenon that is New York. You may want to watch so many New York movies that you become so familiar with the settings you can point to where they are exactly on a map. You may want to make some New York friends online. When you feel you have enough knowledge and connection to New York, perhaps you can start writing parts of your book. You will have to modify and rewrite parts of it when you actually get to see the place, but it's great to make a start when you already have something to write.

Eventually, your dream may be achieved in a similar fashion to your roadmap plan, or maybe not. Maybe you'll find something even more suitable in your life. But in any case, none of it goes to waste, and every bit of it would have helped coloured your life vividly. Twenty years down the line, it's quite likely you would have lived in New York and finished your book. Or alternatively, you may have decided to just settle in Auckland, but have a cultural connection to New York. By then you might have already seen the city on two or three different trips there during your annual leaves, paid for with the money you saved over the years. Although you didn't write a book about living in New York, you did write a book about your connection to New York and your opinions about the city as a New Zealander, an even more unique thing. You might have also written another book about living in Auckland, or perhaps a book comparing and contrasting the two cities. Either way, the dream did not go to waste.

One important thing is that you enjoy the process as much as the outcome. In my example above, there would be new experiences and inspirations every year along the way. It's not the final act of moving to New York (or not) that mattered, it's the knowledge, experiences and friendships gained over the years that were the main gains from this big dream.

5.6 It's a Long Ride: Living the Practical Life whilst Chasing your Dreams

When you were younger, you could have all these wild dreams about the future. But then, you also needed to deal with the reality of what was then right now - schoolwork, exams, all the practical stuff associated with your life at the time. After all, if you failed that test, your parents would likely give you a hard time, and you didn't want that.

Now that you are an adult, it's a similar situation. In parallel with dreaming big and trying to achieve your dreams, you also need to take care of things like making ends meet and paying bills. It's just how life is. It's just that these things have replaced your schoolwork and exams as the things you 'just need to do' in life.

Don't let all these things drag you down though. Although like school you need to do these things 'well enough' to avoid trouble, you shouldn't let your spirit of dreaming get tarnished by any setbacks in these practical everyday things. After all, a poor score on one test at school didn't affect your dreams about the future, right?

Another thing is that, for dream chasing young adults these days, 'settling down' has become a thing of the past. The practical realities of the biological clock and dreams taking longer to come true means that we often will need to think about starting families before the dreams in life have come true. However, starting a family doesn't mean we need to adopt the 'settling down' philosophy of previous generations. To us, the duties and hard work associated with starting a family is just another

thing we have to juggle in life, on the long road towards achieving our dreams.

5.7 The Secret Ingredient to Battling On Whilst Keeping your Dream Alive: Feeling Special

Besides having the right mindset, the roadmap, and the priorities, there's another secret ingredient to keeping your dreams alive for a long time, even in the face of adversity. It is believing that you are special.

Let me tell you something: you are special. You are special because of who you are, the way you see things, and the way you do things. You are special because of your experiences, and how you dealt with them. You are special because of all this combined, and as a result, what you have to offer to the world.

You are special, and you were born to do some special work in this life. You may not know what it is yet, but the dreams you have in your life will guide you there. Once you have this in mind, you will be able to face any adversity, and keep your dreams alive and energetic.

You may ask, how can everyone be special? Am I telling a lie here? After all, who is ordinary then, if everyone is special?

Actually, everyone, every human being has been special from day one of history. Computers can be ordinary, but all humans are special. But although society has existed for so long, until now it has not been evolved enough to allow everyone's specialness to be recognised - just like once upon a time it was not ready to embrace ideas like equality for men and women and rights for gay couples. We are the first generation where society has

become ready to embrace this idea - hence many of us were taught this idea when we were growing up. This idea alone can cause a revolution, however, and there are signs that sections of society are pushing back against it as a result. We must push forward with this revolutionary idea, however, and ignore those voices that want to take us back.

In the next chapter I will discuss this in more detail.

CHAPTER VI. They're Killing the 'Special' Generation But We Need to Keep It Alive

6.1 The Generation who Grew Up 'Special' and a Potential Cultural Change

For many generations, people grew up with the expectation that most people are going to be ordinary in life, and only a selected few are special people. Generation upon generation have lived like this, not knowing what they missed out upon.

But for the generation born after around 1980, this changed. Many of us grew up being told that we were special. That we would all do some special things in life, in the future, when we grew up. It's a way of raising a generation that has never been tried before, that can have major consequences for society. Sort of like when gender equality was first introduced.

Actually, everyone, every human being has been special from day one of history. But until now society has not been evolved enough to allow everyone's specialness to be recognised - just like once upon a time it was not ready to accept ideas equality between men and women. As a result, many generations lived and died believing that they were ordinary, and never achieved the full function of their specialness in life. It's just like how women lived and died in many ages past not knowing how they could be seen as equal to men and have the same rights in law. But once we have moved forward from there, looking back we see how limiting the past paradigm was.

We are the first generation where society has become ready to embrace this idea - hence many of us were taught this idea when we were growing up. Society has become ready because

in the First World at least, we have solved the problems of widespread poverty, hunger and disease. Another important recent development is that we have already developed a system where religious, cultural and ideological differences can be settled peacefully and we can be tolerant of each other's different beliefs, and there is thus not as much a need for one group to be dominant over another, or to have everyone formed into tribes ruled by tribal leaders. In the First World at least, we have moved beyond all that.

The idea that we are all special is capable of starting a revolution in and of itself. No longer will people just accept that they will live like every generation that has come before them. No longer will people just accept that they are interchangeable with their other colleagues at work, as if everybody was a small, easily replaceable part in a large machine. Everyone will live their life trying to find their life's work,

and express and use their specialness in different ways. It's really a very exciting time in society's history. In fact, the phenomena of the quarter life crisis, dreams taking longer to achieve, people taking longer to settle down or no longer even thinking about settling down, these are all society's first steps in adjusting to the new situation.

6.2 Why they Need to Kill This Off

The 'everyone is special' revolution may be good for everyone on paper, but as with all revolutions that have come before, there are people who stand to lose out, or feel they stand to lose out. As a result, there are people who are going to push back against it. This time, we do have quite a challenge: part of those pushing back are loaded up with money, and are busily pouring their unlimited buckets of cold water on our generation.

Some old style bosses may feel that if everyone feels special, then nobody is going to be doing the menial jobs that need being done. They feel that our generation has a 'sense of entitlement' and is therefore not willing to do the unglamourous work. But anybody from our

generation will recognise this as a straw man. Most of our generation is more than willing to work hard. It is because of our feeling of specialness that we are willing to work harder than previous generations. We do feel we have special work to do in life, but we don't feel particularly 'entitled' to anything.

Another group is those who just fear any major social change and put up their resistance accordingly. But resistance to social change is always futile - think the end of bans on interracial marriage, gender equality, computers, the internet, gay rights. The resisting side has lost every time. And that has been good for us - if they had won we would have missed out on major progress every time. Being on the wrong side of history just because you fear change is always misguided.

Yet another group are those who are sincere about solving the problem of the quarter life crisis, but have gone about it in the wrong way. They think that we must have our high ambitions and endless but yet unfulfilled dreams stripped away from us so that we can live normal lives like generations that came before us. And at the core of our ambitions and dreams is this feeling of specialness. Therefore, they feel that they must undo our 'everyone is special' upbringing.

In conclusion, those who want to kill off the 'everyone is special' revolution are all misguided people. However, that doesn't change the fact that they keep putting out their discouraging messages, blaming the educators for teaching us this way, blaming our parents for bringing us up this way, as if they could put the genie back in the bottle. And since they continue to be misguided and act accordingly, we need to protect the flame of hope that came from our

special knowledge - that we are special - from these constant buckets of cold water.

6.3 But You ARE Special - Reasons to Remind Yourself

You are special, and you were born to do some special work in this life. You are the way you are because there is some special work out there that requires someone like you to do it. Without you, that piece of the puzzle will be missing.

Your are special because you are special to someone. It may be your partner, your parents, or somebody you will meet in the future. It may even be someone you don't know - but they know you, and cherish your existence.

You are special, because no other mind in the world thinks and works in the same way, and has the same material (experiences and memories) to work on. As a result, no other

mind will have the same output on a given topic.

You are special, and the world would be missing a unique part of its richness if you did not exist. It would be like a colourful quilt made up of pieces of different colours, but one piece was missing. Wouldn't it be sad?

Even your imperfections are unique, and they make you even more special. Only with your imperfections you could have experienced the world in this particular way, and have the particular memories you have. You can then use that experience to help other people, especially others with the same imperfections.

6.4 When the World will not Accept that 'You are Special'

Unfortunately, even if you believe that you are special, it doesn't follow that everyone will believe the same about you. In fact, it is almost ridiculous to expect the big machine that is 'the system' to believe that anybody is special, when it clearly functions more like robot than human.

Even if you have it resolved that you are special and you are going to embrace it, the world will still pour buckets of cold water onto your flame from time to time.

I believe the best solution to this problem is to continue to do the work you need to do, whilst ignoring this kind of critique. It's like how you dealt with the school teacher who never liked

you, who would find opportunities to criticise you whenever he could. I think the best attitude to have to those parts of the world which insist on treating you like nothing special is the same attitude you had to this teacher. You still had to do the assignments and tests in his class, but you knew what he said was usually irrelevant. You did the work in his class well enough, but you avoided letting his critiques get to you.

CHAPTER VII. FINAL WORDS

7.1 Summarizing the point of the whole book

If you read this book and don't remember or understand everything in it, don't worry. Here's a check list of take home messages:

- 1) There are many 20-somethings and 30-somethings out there feeling old and being forced to give up on their dreams. If you feel this way, you are not alone. Yet you DON'T have to feel this way.
- 2) There is no good reason why anyone under the age of 45 should need to feel they are getting old, except the media distorting reality as a result of their commercial decisions. We should resist being affected by this.

3) The key thing about being young is to have a spirit of boundless dreaming. Dream big, and believe in your dreams.

4) Dreams take longer, not shorter, to achieve in this day and age, even though the media makes it look like the opposite. You will need to find good ways of keeping your dreams alive for the long ride ahead. But that doesn't mean you won't have a happy life along the way. You will have a happy and fulfilling life, as long as you keep your dreams alive and steer them well.

5) The impersonal 'system' out there is a destroyer of dreams. Therefore, don't put all your dreaming eggs in a basket that can be easily quashed by the system.

6) And finally, remember that you are special. Especially on the days that the world seems to want to say that you are not special, you have to overcome those buckets of cold water, and hold firm to this belief.

7.2 Be Part of the Cultural Change Yet to Happen

The final message is that the quarter life crisis phenomenon is a whole of society phenomenon, and where our shared culture has an important part to play. Whilst looking after yourself through this period is important, and was the main theme of this book, it cannot be stressed enough that we, as a society, need to collectively solve this problem.

The cultural change required will take a long time, especially since we may be moving against the direction of commercial interests in some areas. But it will happen, because people want it to happen, and their lives will be better for it.

Remember, you can be part of the cultural change too. Talk about or even write about your experiences. Be amongst the people contributing to the positive messages out there. Provide your unique point of view to go with it. Every contribution is invaluable.